

Policy Research Centers Grant Program

FY 2012 Request for Applications

APPLICATION DEADLINE: February 13, 2012



**U.S. Department of Agriculture
National Institute of Food and Agriculture**

**NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURE;
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**

POLICY RESEARCH CENTERS

INITIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

CATALOG OF FEDERAL DOMESTIC ASSISTANCE: This program is listed in the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance under **10.200**

DATES: Applications must be received by close of business (COB) on February 13, 2012 (**5:00 p.m. Eastern Time**). Applications received after this deadline will normally not be considered for funding. Comments received after that date will be considered to the extent practicable.

STAKEHOLDER INPUT: The National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) is requesting comments regarding this RFA from any interested party. These comments will be considered in the development of the next RFA for the program, if applicable, and will be used to meet the requirements of section 103(c)(2) of the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 (7 U.S.C. 7613(c)(2)). This section requires the Secretary to solicit and consider input on a current RFA from persons who conduct or use agricultural research, education and extension for use in formulating future RFAs for competitive programs. Written stakeholder comments on this RFA should be submitted in accordance with the deadline set forth in the DATES portion of this Notice.

Written stakeholder comments should be submitted by mail to: Policy and Oversight Division; Office of Grants and Financial Management; National Institute of Food and Agriculture; USDA; STOP 2299; 1400 Independence Avenue, SW; Washington, DC 20250-2299; or via e-mail to: Policy@nifa.usda.gov. (This e-mail address is intended only for receiving comments regarding this RFA and not requesting information or forms.) In your comments, please state that you are responding to the Policy Research Centers RFA.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: NIFA announces the availability of grant funds and requests applications for Policy Research Centers (PRC) Grant Program for fiscal year FY 2012. A PRC is defined to have the analytical capacity to either perform policy analysis across multiple sets of public policy issues or have a specialized capacity in a single policy area. A center may reside in a single institution or be a collaborative effort across multiple institutions. These centers will conduct research and education programs that are objective, operationally independent, and external to the Federal Government and that concern the effect of public policies and trade agreements on the following areas: (1) The farm and agricultural sectors (including commodities, livestock, dairy, and specialty crops); (2) the environment; (3) rural families, households, and economies; and (4) consumers, food, and nutrition. The amount available for support of this program in FY 2012 is approximately **\$3,840,000**.

This notice identifies the objectives for PRC projects, the eligibility criteria for centers and applicants, and the application forms and associated instructions needed to apply for a PRC grant.

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PART I—FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

A. Legislative Authority and Background

The Policy Research Centers (PRC) Grant Program is authorized under section 1419A of the National Agricultural Research, Extension, And Teaching Policy Act of 1977, 7 U.S.C. 3155. Fiscal Year (FY) 2012 funding is appropriated under the Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2012, Pub. L. No. 112-55.

B. Purpose and Priorities

The purpose of the grant program is to support rigorous and comprehensive research and education programs on the impact of public policies and trade agreements on farmers, ranchers, consumers and taxpayers. In addition, proposed research and education programs should be objective, operationally independent, and external to the Federal Government and focus on the effect of public policies and trade agreements specifically on the following emphasis areas: (1) The farm and agricultural sectors (including commodities, livestock, dairy and specialty crops); (2) the environment; (3) rural families, households, and economies; and (4) consumers, food, and nutrition. Research may be either disciplinary or interdisciplinary concerning policy research activities identified above and include activities that (1) quantify implications of public policies and regulations; (2) develop theoretical and research methods; (3) collect, analyze, and disseminate data for policy makers, analysts, and individuals; and (4) develop programs to train future analysts.

Grant recipients should have existing institutional capacity to undertake comprehensive levels of policy analysis at farm-level, regional, national and/or international scales and present results and findings in an accessible and timely fashion.

Applications are being solicited for FY 2012 as described in Part II – Award Information.

C. Program Area Description

Background

A primary goal of public policy is to reduce Federal spending in attempts to reduce the national debt. Trimming national debt requires public policies that withstand fiscal scrutiny and effectively meet goals at least cost and with few unintended negative impacts. Questions for policy makers include: Can commodity and income safety net policies be designed to meet various societal goals at least cost to taxpayers? Can conservation policies be designed that are consistent with farmer or rancher production goals while maintaining the long run sustainability of natural resources at minimum cost? How can rural communities and economic development be strengthened to improve the lives of rural households with greatly reduced resources? What needs to be done to provide an abundance of affordable safe and nutritious food for consumers? Specific topics of interest include bioenergy; climate change and other conservation and environmental policies or regulations; trade policy; nutrition; food safety; production risks and insurance mechanisms; and agricultural research policy. The goal of this grant program is to

support policy research centers to enhance their capacity to address these many issues in a comprehensive, timely and robust manner.

Public Policy Areas of Emphasis

Policy Research Centers (PRC) should be able to conduct innovative public policy research on agricultural, rural economy, environmental, and food policy issues. PRCs should be able to develop and apply economic theory, and quantitative methods to effectively analyze and inform public policy. Policies and regulations that affect the agricultural sector, rural communities, the environment and consumers include the Farm Bill; conservation policy; the Clean Water and Clean Air Acts; tax policy; immigration policy and international trade agreements. Grant recipient PRCs will perform policy analysis of the impacts of these and related policies on the four emphasis areas described below.

Two types of centers are envisioned. The first type has the capacity to perform policy analysis on most or all of the emphasis areas and therefore has the ability to assess trade-offs and indirect effects of policy across emphasis areas. This type is termed a multiple area emphasis center. The second type of PRC, termed the single area emphasis center, will specialize in a single area based on a center's specialization, but the recipient should be able to address indirect effects of policy changes on other areas. The four public policy emphasis areas (and suggested related topics) are:

- (1) The farm and agricultural sectors: Analyze the impacts of commodity programs; program participation; crop insurance and risk management; science and technology policy; dairy policy and specialty crops and livestock. Perform analyses at farm-level, regional and national and/or international scales.
- (2) The environment: Analyze environmental and conservation policies such as the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and Clean Water Act; water quantity and quality issues; climate change policies; the economic and environmental impacts of drought and other environmental stressors; bioenergy; and sustainable agriculture.
- (3) Rural families, households, and economies: Examine the impact of policy changes on rural communities; rural health policy analysis; access to health care and rural health delivery; entrepreneurship; and economic development.
- (4) Consumers, food, and nutrition: Analyze policies relating to the performance of the food production and marketing system; food safety policies and regulations; food quality, human nutrition and obesity; and access to nutritious and affordable food.

The analysis should be farm-level, regional and national and/or international in scope and ideally be able to address all four of the public policies areas identified above directly or indirectly. The research should be able to assess the economic impact of policy alternatives addressing those areas. Economic impacts include: commodity prices, (crops, livestock, and specialty crops); consumer price impacts; farm and nonfarm incomes, both mean effects and the distributional impacts; Federal budgetary and program cost. Analysis of environmental policies relating to, for example, climate change policies or clean water or air policies such include interdisciplinary

teams to ensure rigorous analysis of both environmental impacts and the economic costs or benefits of those impacts. The analysis should be able to assess the intended impacts of individual policies on targeted objectives and the unintended or indirect impact of the analyzed policies on other targets or considerations. Analysis should include near-term and long-run impacts. Analysis should also be prospective and retrospective. For example, policy makers and others will want to know what a range of possible impacts might be from potential or proposed policies. Such information will aid the development of policy to minimize undesirable impacts or unintended consequences. Retrospective analysis will inform policy makers and others of potential impacts of existing or enacted policy. This kind of analysis will provide feedback for improving policy over time.

Program Code Name: Policy Research Centers Grant Program

Program Area Code – FAPR

Application Deadline – February 13, 2012 (5:00 p.m., ET)

Proposed Budget Requests –

- Standard Grants must not exceed \$960,000 total, including indirect costs, for project periods of up to 2 years. Program anticipates making 4 to 6 awards in FY 2012.
- Requests exceeding the budgetary guidelines will not be reviewed.

Program Area Contact – Dr. Robbin Shoemaker (202-720-5468 or rshoemaker@nifa.usda.gov)

Program Area Priority – Applicants must have a well documented record of performing national level policy analysis and a demonstrated ability to present results and findings in a clear concise manner accessible to a wide variety of audiences. The research must be rigorous enough to withstand academic peer-review, be well documented and verifiable.

Other Program Area Requirements:

- All applications must adhere to the requirements beginning in Part IV.
- Applications from and collaborations with Minority Serving Institutions are strongly encouraged.
- Centers should provide training opportunities for new analysts to develop skills in public policy analysis and dissemination.

PART II—AWARD INFORMATION

A. Available Funding

There is no commitment by USDA to fund any particular application or to make a specific number of awards. Approximately \$3,840,000 is available to fund applications in FY 2012. Funding will be made available through competitive grants.

Awards issued as a result of this RFA will have designated the Automated Standard Applications for Payment System (ASAP), operated by the Department of Treasury's Financial Management Service, as the payment system for funds. For more information see http://www.nifa.usda.gov/business/method_of_payment.html.

B. Types of Applications

In FY 2012, applications may be submitted to the PRC Grant Program as a **New Application**. This is a project application that has not been previously submitted to the PRC Program. All new applications will be reviewed competitively using the selection process and evaluation criteria described in Part V—Application Review Requirements.

C. Project Types

In FY 2012, the PRC project has established that the maximum amount for an award is \$960,000 (including indirect costs). Applications requesting more than the maximum amount will not be considered for funding. Total project periods may not exceed two (2) years.

Funding Estimate FY 2012	Number of New Awards Anticipated FY 2012	Estimated Minimum Award	Estimated Maximum Award
\$3,840,000	4 - 6	\$450,000	\$960,000

Centers will include the development or enhancement of existing capacity to perform public policy analysis. Funds will support development of theoretical and empirical research methods and models to evaluate and quantify the economic impact of existing or proposed alternative policies and regulations on the agricultural sector, consumers, the environment and taxpayers, (as appropriate). Approaches may include econometric or large-scale simulation models which provide baseline and outlook projections of near- and long-term economic activity and policy impacts. Funding may also be used to collect, analyze, and disseminate data for policy makers, analysts, and individuals. Finally, centers should include training opportunities for developing public policy analytical skills for new analysts.

PART III—ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

A. Eligible Applicants

Applications may be submitted by State agricultural experiment stations, colleges and universities, other research institutions and organizations, private organizations, corporations, and individuals (7 U.S.C. 3155).

Award recipients may subcontract to organizations not eligible to apply provided such organizations are necessary for the conduct of the project. An applicant's failure to meet an eligibility criterion by the time of an application deadline may result in the application being excluded from consideration or, even though an application may be reviewed, will preclude NIFA from making an award.

B. Cost Sharing or Matching

NIFA does not require matching support for this program and matching resources will not be factored into the review process as evaluation criteria.

PART IV—APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

A. Electronic Application Package

Only electronic applications may be submitted via Grants.gov to NIFA in response to this RFA. **Applicants are advised to submit early to the Grants.gov system.**

New Users of Grants.gov

Prior to preparing an application, it is suggested that the PD/PI first contact an Authorized Representative (AR)(also referred to as Authorized Organizational Representative or AOR) to determine if the organization is prepared to submit electronic applications through Grant.gov. If the organization is not prepared (e.g., the institution/organization is new to the electronic grant application process through Grants.gov), then the one-time registration process must be completed PRIOR to submitting an application. It can take as much as two weeks to complete the registration process so it is critical to begin as soon as possible. In such situations the AR should go to **“Get Registered” on the Grants.gov left navigation bar (or go to http://www.grants.gov/applicants/get_registered.jsp) for information on registering the institution/organization with Grants.gov. A quick reference guide listing the steps is available as a 4-page PDF document at the following website: <http://www.grants.gov/assets/Grants.govRegistrationBrochure.pdf>.** Item 2. below mentions the “NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.” Part II.1. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide contains additional explanatory language regarding the registration process.

Steps to Obtain Application Package Materials

The steps to access application materials are as follows:

1. In order to access, complete and submit applications, applicants must download and install a version of Adobe Reader compatible with Grants.gov. This software is essential to apply for NIFA Federal assistance awards. For basic system requirements and download instructions, please see http://www.grants.gov/help/download_software.jsp. To verify that you have a compatible version of Adobe Reader, Grants.gov established a test package that will assist you in making that determination. Grants.gov Adobe Versioning Test Package: <http://www.grants.gov/applicants/AdobeVersioningTestOnly.jsp>.
2. The application package must be obtained via Grants.gov, go to <http://www.grants.gov>, click on “Apply for Grants” in the left-hand column, click on **“Step 1: Download a Grant Application Package and Instructions,”** enter the funding opportunity number **“USDA-NIFA-FAPR-003632”** in the appropriate box and click “Download Package.” From the search results, click “Download” to access the application package.

Contained within the application package is the “NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide: A Guide for Preparation and Submission of NIFA Applications via Grants.gov.” This Guide contains an introduction and general Grants.gov instructions, information about

how to use a Grant Application Package in Grants.gov, and instructions on how to complete the application forms.

If assistance is needed to access the application package (e.g., downloading or navigating Adobe forms), **or submitting the application** then refer to resources available on the Grants.gov Web site first (<http://www.grants.gov/>). Grants.gov assistance is also available as follows:

Grants.gov customer support

1-800-518-4726 Toll-Free or 606-545-5035

Business Hours: 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Closed on [Federal Holidays](#).

Email: support@grants.gov

Grants.gov iPortal: Top 10 requested help topics (FAQs), Searchable knowledge base, self service ticketing and ticket status, and live web chat (available 7:00 A.M. - 9:00 P.M. ET). Get help now!

Please have the following information available when contacting Grants.gov, to help expedite your inquiry:

- Funding Opportunity Number (FON)
- Name of Agency You Are Applying To
- Specific Area of Concern

See http://grants.gov/applicants/app_help_reso.jsp or <http://www.nifa.usda.gov/funding/electronic.html> for additional resources for applying electronically.

B. Content and Form of Application Submission

Electronic applications should be prepared following Parts V and VI of the document entitled “A Guide for Preparation and Submission of NIFA Applications via Grants.gov.” This guide is part of the corresponding application package (see Section A. of this Part). The following is **additional information** needed in order to prepare an application in response to this RFA. **If there is discrepancy between the two documents, the information contained in this RFA is overriding.**

Note the attachment requirements (e.g., portable document format) in Part III section 3. of the Guide. ANY PROPOSALS THAT ARE NON-COMPLIANT WITH THE REQUIREMENTS (i.e., content format, pdf file format, file name restrictions, and no password protected files) WILL BE AT RISK OF BEING EXCLUDED FROM NIFA REVIEW. Partial applications will be excluded from NIFA review. With documented prior approval, subsequent submissions of an application will be accepted until close of business on the closing date in the RFA.

If you do not own PDF-generating software, Grants.gov provides online tools to assist applicants. Users will find a link to “Convert Documents to PDF” on http://grants.gov/help/download_software.jsp#pdf_conversion_programs.

For any questions related to the preparation of an application please review the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide and the applicable request for applications. If assistance is still needed for preparing application forms content, contact:

- Email: electronic@nifa.usda.gov
- Phone: 202-401-5048
- Business hours: Monday through Friday, 7:00 am – 5:00 pm Eastern Time, excluding Federal holidays.

1. SF 424 R&R Cover Sheet

Information related to the questions on this form is dealt with in detail in Part V, 2. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

2. SF 424 R&R Project/Performance Site Location(s)

Information related to the questions on this form is dealt with in detail in Part V, 3. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

3. R&R Other Project Information Form

Information related to the questions on this form is dealt with in detail in Part V, 4. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

a. Field 7. Project Summary/Abstract. The summary should also include the relevance of the project to the goals of the PRC. See Part V. 4.7 of NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide for further instructions and a link to a suggested template.

b. Field 8. Project Narrative.

PLEASE NOTE: The Project Narrative shall not exceed 15 pages of written text regardless of whether it is single or double spaced and up to 5 additional pages for figures and tables. This maximum of 20 pages has been established to ensure fair and equitable competition. The Project Narrative must include all of the following:

(1) Statement of Area(s) of Emphasis

- Introduction:** Provide a clear statement of the area(s) of emphasis of the center and the goal(s) and supporting objectives of the proposed activities. Summarize the body of knowledge or other past activities which substantiate the need for the proposed center. Describe ongoing or recently completed significant activities related to the proposed center including the work of key center personnel. In addition, this section should include information on the following, when applicable:
 - Critical policy issues and their relevance to stakeholders.
 - Role of the stakeholders in problem identification, planning, and implementation and evaluation as appropriate.

- iii. Reasons for having the work performed at the proposing institution.
- b. Centers should be able to rigorously address all four emphasis areas *or* provide a high level of expertise to a single area, (e.g., rural economies and entrepreneurship; environmental and conservation policy; or food safety and nutrition policy). Applicants of either type must provide clear evidence of their existing capacity and capabilities and record of success in their research area(s). It is highly desirable that the overall analytical capacity developed through these grants should be able to look across the four public policy areas of emphasis. Therefore, single area applicants who provide plans for coordination with other institutions undertaking similar work addressing other areas are encouraged.
 - i. Provide evidence of knowledge of food and farm sector economics and policy issues; environmental and conservation policy; or rural economy issues, past, present and future.
 - ii. Provide evidence of experience and existing capacity for farm sector or national economic modeling. Modeling capacity should include farm-level, regional, national and/or international models and the ability to estimate the impact of policy changes over space and time.

Or

- iii. For specialized areas, such as environmental modeling, indicate evidence of modeling capacity at regional or national scales. Environmental modeling should also be able to link to economic models to estimate the value of environmental impacts.

(2) Work Plan

- a. Objectives: Objectives must address at least one of the emphasis areas listed in Part I, B; within the context of the PRC vision enumerated in Part I, C. Use an outline format for this section with objectives as primary headings. Clear, concise, complete, and logically arranged statement(s) of specific aims of the proposed effort must be included in all proposals.
- b. Methods: The procedures or methodology to be applied to the proposed effort should be explicitly stated. This section should include but not necessarily be limited to:
 - (1) A description of the proposed center activities;
 - (2) Techniques to be employed, including their feasibility and rationale for their use in this center;
 - (3) Kinds of results expected;
 - (4) Means by which data will be analyzed or interpreted.
 - (5) Under each activity, list expected outcomes and describe the proposed means of evaluating the activity's efficacy and any outcomes' value to stakeholders. The plan should allow evaluation results to refine and adjust objectives and activities while informing future plans. Activities include:
 - i. quantify the implications of public policies and regulations;

- ii. develop theoretical and research methods;
- iii. collect, analyze, and disseminate data and information for policy makers, analysts, and individuals; and
- iv. development of programs to train analysts.

c. Project Timetable: The proposal should outline all important phases as a function of time for the entire project, including periods beyond the grant funding period.

(3) Qualifications of Project Personnel, Adequacy of Facilities, and Project Management

- a. Roles of key personnel are clearly defined;
- b. Key personnel have sufficient expertise to complete the proposed project, and where appropriate, partnerships with other disciplines and institutions are established;
- c. Evidence of institutional capacity and competence in the proposed area of work is provided;
- d. Support personnel, facilities, and instrumentation are sufficient; and
- e. A clear plan is articulated for project management, including time allocated for attainment of objectives and delivery of products, maintenance of partnerships and collaborations, and a strategy to enhance communication, data sharing, and reporting among members of the project team.

(4) Information Dissemination Plan

- a. The information dissemination plans should clearly indicate how research findings will be made available to stakeholders. All applicants must provide a clear indication of their record of success in publication, briefings to policy makers and other forms of information dissemination.
- b. Information should be disseminated in two ways:
 - i. Publication in peer-reviewed journals or presentations at professional meetings to ensure the research meets high professional quality standards.
 - ii. Policy analysis should be made available to policy makers, analysts and individuals in clear and accessible language. The analysis and release of information should be as timely as possible to inform policy decisions in the best possible manner. Information dissemination can include web sites, webinars, publications and briefings and other forms of information dissemination.

(5) Budget

Budget apportions funds appropriately given scope of project and applies funds in cost effective and efficient manner; budget forms comply with instructions; amounts are allocated and tallied correctly; and narrative provides adequate justification in each budget category used.

NOTE: Budgets must reflect Annual Base Salary, Number of Funded Work Months (Calendar/Academic/Summer) for all Senior/Key Personnel.

4. R&R Senior/Key Person Profile (Expanded)

Information related to the questions on this form is dealt with in detail in Part V, 5. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide. Part V, 5. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide includes information about the individuals for which a Senior/Key Person Profile must be completed, and details about the Biographical Sketch and the Current and Pending Support including a link to a suggested template for the Current and Pending Support.

5. R&R Personal Data

As noted in Part V, 6. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide, the submission of this information is voluntary and is not a precondition of award.

6. R&R Budget

Information related to the questions on this form is dealt with in detail in Part V, 7. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

7. Supplemental Information Form

Information related to the questions on this form is dealt with in detail in Part VI, 1. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

- a. Field 2. Program to which you are applying.** Enter the program code name *Policy Research Centers Grant Program* and the program code *FAPR*.
- b. Field 8. Conflict of Interest List.** See Part VI, 1.6 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide for further instructions and a link to a suggested template.

C. Submission Dates and Times

Instructions for submitting an application are included in Part IV, Section 1.9 of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

Applications must be received by Grants.gov by COB on **February 13, 2012** (5:00 p.m. Eastern Time). Applications received after this deadline will normally not be considered for funding.

Applicants who have problems with the submission of an application to Grants.gov are encouraged to FIRST contact the Grants.gov Help Desk to resolve any problems. Keep a record of any such correspondence. See Part IV. A. for Grants.gov contact information.

Correspondence regarding submitted applications will be sent using e-mail. Therefore, applicants are strongly encouraged to provide accurate e-mail addresses, where designated, on the SF-424 R&R Application for Federal Assistance.

If the AR has not received correspondence **from NIFA** regarding a submitted application within 15 days of the established deadline, please contact the Program Contact identified in Part VII of

the applicable RFA and request the proposal number assigned to the application. **Failure to do so may result in the application not being considered for funding by the peer review panel. Once the application has been assigned a proposal number, this number should be cited on all future correspondence.**

D. Funding Restrictions

Section 720 of the Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2012 (Pub.L. No. 112-55) limits indirect costs to 30 percent of the total Federal funds provided under each award. Therefore, when preparing budgets, applicants should limit their requests for recovery of indirect costs to the lesser of their institution's official negotiated indirect cost rate or the equivalent of 30 percent of total Federal funds awarded.

NIFA has determined that grant funds awarded under this authority may not be used for the renovation or refurbishment of research, education, or extension space; the purchase or installation of fixed equipment in such space; or the planning, repair, rehabilitation, acquisition, or construction of buildings or facilities.

E. Other Submission Requirements

The applicant should follow the submission requirements noted in Part IV, section 1.9 in the document entitled “NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.”

For information about the **status of a submitted application**, see Part III., section 6. of the NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide.

PART V—APPLICATION REVIEW REQUIREMENTS

A. General

Each application will be evaluated in a 2-part process. First, each application will be screened to ensure that it meets the administrative requirements as set forth in this RFA. Second, applications that meet these requirements will be technically evaluated by a review panel.

Reviewers will be selected based upon training and experience in relevant scientific, extension, or education fields, taking into account the following factors: (a) The level of relevant formal scientific, technical education, or extension experience of the individual, as well as the extent to which an individual is engaged in relevant research, education, or extension activities; (b) the need to include as reviewers experts from various areas of specialization within relevant scientific, education, or extension fields; (c) the need to include as reviewers other experts (e.g., producers, range or forest managers/operators, and consumers) who can assess relevance of the applications to targeted audiences and to program needs; (d) the need to include as reviewers experts from a variety of organizational types (e.g., colleges, universities, industry, state and Federal agencies, private profit and non-profit organizations) and geographic locations; (e) the need to maintain a balanced composition of reviewers with regard to minority and female representation and an equitable age distribution; and (f) the need to include reviewers who can judge the effective usefulness to producers and the general public of each application.

B. Evaluation Criteria

The evaluation criteria below will be used in reviewing applications submitted in response to this RFA (maximum points are in parenthesis):

(1) Coverage of Public Policy Areas of Emphasis (20 pts.)

a. Multiple Areas of Emphasis: (20 pts.)

A center may propose to provide expertise on all four areas of emphasis. Such inclusion will allow the maximum ability to assess trade-offs and impacts of policies across all areas simultaneously.

OR

b. Single Areas of Emphasis: (20 pts.)

Centers may focus on a single specialized area, (e.g., rural economies and entrepreneurship; environmental and conservation policy; or food safety and nutrition policy). Applicants specializing in a single area must provide clear evidence of their capabilities and record of success in that area. Because it is highly desirable that the overall analytical capacity developed through these grants be able to look across the four public policy areas of emphasis, it is desirable that single area applicants have research relationships with other institutions addressing complementary areas of research.

(2) Merit of the Application for Performing Public Policy Analysis. (25 pts.)

- a. Objectives must address at least one of the emphasis areas listed in Part I, B; within the context of the PRC vision enumerated in Part I, C. Clear, concise,

complete, and logically arranged statement(s) of specific aims of the proposed effort are included in the proposal.

- b. Center objectives and outcomes are clearly described, adequate, and appropriate.

Objective activities include:

- i. quantify the implications of public policies and regulations;
 - ii. develop theoretical and research methods;
 - iii. collect, analyze, and disseminate data for policy makers, analysts, and individuals; and
 - iv. develop programs to train analysts.
- c. Proposed approach, procedures, or methodologies are innovative, original, clearly described, suitable, and feasible;
- d. Expected results or outcomes are clearly stated, measurable, and achievable within the allotted time frame;
- e. Proposed research fills knowledge gaps that are critical to the development of practices and programs to address the stated problem or issue; and
- f. Proposed education (training) has an impact upon and advances the quality of public policy analysis by strengthening institutional capacities and curricula to meet clearly the needs of the next generation of scientists and educators.

(3) Qualifications of Project Personnel, Adequacy of Facilities, and Project Management (25 pts)

- a. Roles of key personnel are clearly defined;
- b. Key personnel have sufficient expertise to complete the proposed project, and where appropriate, partnerships with other disciplines and institutions are established;
 - i. Evidence of knowledge of food and farm sector economics and policy issues; rural or environmental policies and issues, as appropriate, past and present.
- c. Evidence of institutional capacity, experience and competence in the proposed area of work is provided, e.g., evidence of substantial experience and existing capacity in one or all of:
 - i. Farm and agricultural sector modeling;
 - ii. Environmental policy modeling;
 - iii. Modeling of policy impacts on rural families, households, and economies; and
 - iv. Modeling of policy impacts on consumers, food, and nutrition.
 - v. For farm sector modeling, modeling capacity should include farm-level, regional, national and/or international models and be able to estimate policy impacts over space and time. Estimates should include baseline and policy impacts.
 - vi. For specialized areas, such as environmental modeling, indicate evidence of modeling capacity at regional, national or international scales. Environmental modeling should also be able to link to economic model to estimate value of environmental impacts.
- d. Support personnel, facilities, and instrumentation are sufficient;

- e. A clear plan is articulated for project management, including time allocated for attainment of objectives and delivery of products, maintenance of partnerships and collaborations, and a strategy to enhance communication, data sharing, and reporting among members of the project team.

(4) Information Dissemination Plan (25 pts.)

- a. The information dissemination plans clearly indicate how research findings will be made available to stakeholders. All applicants must provide a clear indication of their record of success in publication, briefings to policy makers and other forms of information dissemination.
- b. Information should be disseminated in two ways:
 - i. The first includes publication in peer-reviewed journals or presentations at professional meetings to ensure the research meets high professional quality standards. (10 pts.)
 - ii. Policy analysis should be made available to policy makers, analysts and individuals in clear and accessible language. The analysis and release of information should be as timely as possible to inform policy decisions in the best possible manner. Information dissemination can include web sites, webinars, publications and briefings and other forms of information dissemination. (15 pts.)

(5) Budget (5 pts.)

- a. Budget apportions funds appropriately given scope of project and applies funds in cost effective and efficient manner; project; budget forms comply with instructions; amounts are allocated and tallied correctly; narrative provides adequate justification in each budget category used.

NOTE: Budgets must reflect Annual Base Salary, Number of Funded Work Months (Calendar/Academic/Summer) for all Senior/Key Personnel.

C. Conflicts of Interest and Confidentiality

During the peer evaluation process, extreme care will be taken to prevent any actual or perceived conflicts of interest that may impact review or evaluation. For the purpose of determining conflicts of interest, the academic and administrative autonomy of an institution shall be determined by reference to the current Higher Education Directory, published by Higher Education Publications, Inc., 1801 Robert Fulton Drive, Suite 340, Reston, Virginia 20191. Phone: (888) 349-7715. Web site: <http://www.hepinc.com>.

Names of submitting institutions and individuals, as well as application content and peer evaluations, will be kept confidential, except to those involved in the review process, to the extent permitted by law. In addition, the identities of peer reviewers will remain confidential throughout the entire review process. Therefore, the names of the reviewers will not be released to applicants.

D. Organizational Management Information

Specific management information relating to an applicant shall be submitted on a one time basis, with updates on an as needed basis, as part of the responsibility determination prior to the award of a grant identified under this RFA, if such information has not been provided previously under this or another NIFA program. NIFA will provide copies of forms recommended for use in fulfilling these requirements as part of the preaward process. Although an applicant may be eligible based on its status as one of these entities, there are factors which may exclude an applicant from receiving Federal financial and nonfinancial assistance and benefits under this program (e.g., debarment or suspension of an individual involved or a determination that an applicant is not responsible based on submitted organizational management information).

PART VI—AWARD ADMINISTRATION

A. General

Within the limit of funds available for such purpose, the awarding official of NIFA shall make grants to those responsible, eligible applicants whose applications are judged most meritorious under the procedures set forth in this RFA. The date specified by the awarding official of NIFA as the effective date of the grant shall be no later than September 30 of the Federal fiscal year in which the project is approved for support and funds are appropriated for such purpose, unless otherwise permitted by law. It should be noted that the project need not be initiated on the grant effective date, but as soon thereafter as practical so that project goals may be attained within the funded project period. All funds granted by NIFA under this RFA shall be expended solely for the purpose for which the funds are granted in accordance with the approved application and budget, the regulations, the terms and conditions of the award, the applicable Federal cost principles, the Department's assistance regulations (parts 3015 and 3019 of 7 CFR), and the NIFA General Awards Administration Provisions at 7 CFR part 3430, subparts A through E.

B. Award Notice

The award document will provide pertinent instructions and information including, at a minimum, the following:

- (1) Legal name and address of performing organization or institution to whom the Director has issued an award under the terms of this request for applications;
- (2) Title of project;
- (3) Name(s) and institution(s) of PD's chosen to direct and control approved activities;
- (4) Identifying award number assigned by the Department;
- (5) Project period, specifying the amount of time the Department intends to support the project without requiring recompetition for funds;
- (6) Total amount of Departmental financial assistance approved by the Director during the project period;
- (7) Legal authority(ies) under which the award is issued;
- (8) Appropriate Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) number;
- (9) Applicable award terms and conditions (see <http://www.nifa.usda.gov/business/awards/awardterms.html> to view NIFA award terms and conditions);

(10) Approved budget plan for categorizing allocable project funds to accomplish the stated purpose of the award; and

(11) Other information or provisions deemed necessary by NIFA to carry out its respective awarding activities or to accomplish the purpose of a particular award.

C. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

Several Federal statutes and regulations apply to grant applications considered for review and to project grants awarded under this program. These include, but are not limited to:

2 CFR Part 220 – Cost Principles for Educational Institutions (OMB Circular A-21).

2 CFR Part 225 – Cost Principles for State, Local, and Indian Tribal Governments (OMB Circular A-87).

2 CFR Parts 230 – Cost Principles for Non-profit Organizations (OMB Circular A-122).

7 CFR Part 1, subpart A—USDA implementation of the Freedom of Information Act.

7 CFR Part 3—USDA implementation of OMB Circular No. A-129 regarding debt collection.

7 CFR Part 15, subpart A—USDA implementation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended.

7 CFR Part 331 and 9 CFR Part 121—USDA implementation of the Agricultural Bioterrorism Protection Act of 2002.

7 CFR Part 3015—USDA Uniform Federal Assistance Regulations, implementing OMB directives (i.e., OMB Circular Nos. A-21, A-87, and A-122, now codified at 2 CFR Parts 220, 225 and 230), and incorporating provisions of 31 U.S.C. 6301-6308 (formerly the Federal Grant and Cooperative Agreement Act of 1977, Pub. L. No. 95-224)), as well as general policy requirements applicable to recipients of Departmental financial assistance.

7 CFR Part 3016 – USDA Implementation of Uniform Administrative Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements to State and Local Governments.

7 CFR Part 3017—USDA implementation of Governmentwide Debarment and Suspension (Nonprocurement).

7 CFR Part 3018—USDA implementation of Restrictions on Lobbying. Imposes prohibitions and requirements for disclosure and certification related to lobbying on recipients of Federal contracts, grants, cooperative agreements, and loans.

7 CFR Part 3019—USDA implementation of OMB Circular A-110, Uniform Administrative Requirements for Grants and Other Agreements With Institutions of Higher Education, Hospitals, and Other Nonprofit Organizations (2 CFR Part 215).

7 CFR Part 3021—USDA Implementation of Governmentwide Requirements for Drug-Free Workplace (Grants).

7 CFR Part 3052—USDA implementation of OMB Circular No. A-133, Audits of States, Local Governments, and Nonprofit Organizations.

7 CFR Part 3407—USDA procedures to implement the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended.

7 CFR 3430—Competitive and Noncompetitive Non-formula Grant Programs--General Grant Administrative Provisions.

29 U.S.C. 794 (section 504, Rehabilitation Act of 1973) and 7 CFR Part 15b (USDA implementation of statute) —prohibiting discrimination based upon physical or mental handicap in Federally assisted programs.

35 U.S.C. 200 et seq. —Bayh Dole Act, controlling allocation of rights to inventions made by employees of small business firms and domestic nonprofit organizations, including universities, in Federally assisted programs (implementing regulations are contained in 37 CFR Part 401).

D. Expected Program Outputs and Reporting Requirements

Grantees are to submit initial project information and annual and summary reports to NIFA's electronic, Web-based inventory system that facilitates both grantee submissions of project outcomes and public access to information on Federally-funded projects. The details of these reporting requirements are included in the award terms and conditions. Details of annual and final technical reporting requirements also are included in the award terms and conditions.

PART VII—AGENCY CONTACT

Applicants and other interested parties are encouraged to contact:

Robbin Shoemaker
National Program Leader for Economics
Institute of Food Production and Sustainability
National Institute of Food and Agriculture, USDA
Waterfront Centre – Room 3332
800 9th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20024

Phone: (202) 720-5468

Fax: (202) 401-5179

Email: rshoemaker@nifa.usda.gov

PART VIII—OTHER INFORMATION

A. Access to Review Information

Copies of reviews, not including the identity of reviewers, and a summary of the panel comments will be sent to the applicant PD after the review process has been completed.

B. Use of Funds; Changes

1. Delegation of Fiscal Responsibility

Unless the terms and conditions of the award state otherwise, the awardee may not in whole or in part delegate or transfer to another person, institution, or organization the responsibility for use or expenditure of award funds.

2. Changes in Project Plans

a. The permissible changes by the awardee, PD(s), or other key project personnel in the approved project shall be limited to changes in methodology, techniques, or other similar aspects of the project to expedite achievement of the project's approved goals. If the awardee or the PD(s) is uncertain as to whether a change complies with this provision, the question must be referred to the Authorized Departmental Officer (ADO) for a final determination. The ADO is the signatory of the award document, not the program contact.

b. Changes in approved goals or objectives shall be requested by the awardee and approved in writing by the ADO prior to effecting such changes. In no event shall requests for such changes be approved which are outside the scope of the original approved project.

c. Changes in approved project leadership or the replacement or reassignment of other key project personnel shall be requested by the awardee and approved in writing by the ADO prior to effecting such changes.

d. Transfers of actual performance of the substantive programmatic work in whole or in part and provisions for payment of funds, whether or not Federal funds are involved, shall be requested by the awardee and approved in writing by the ADO prior to effecting such transfers, unless prescribed otherwise in the terms and conditions of the award.

e. The project period may be extended by NIFA without additional financial support, for such additional period(s) as the ADO determines may be necessary to complete or fulfill the purposes of an approved project, but in no case shall the total project period exceed any applicable statutory limit or expiring appropriation limitation. Any extension of time shall be conditioned upon prior request by the awardee and approval in writing by the ADO, unless prescribed otherwise in the terms and conditions of award.

f. Changes in Approved Budget: Unless stated otherwise in the terms and conditions of award, changes in an approved budget must be requested by the awardee and approved in writing by the ADO prior to instituting such changes, if the revision will involve transfers or expenditures of amounts requiring prior approval as set forth in the applicable Federal cost principles, Departmental regulations, or award.

C. Confidential Aspects of Applications and Awards

When an application results in an award, it becomes a part of the record of NIFA transactions, available to the public upon specific request. Information that the Secretary determines to be of a confidential, privileged, or proprietary nature will be held in confidence to the extent permitted by law. Therefore, any information that the applicant wishes to have considered as confidential, privileged, or proprietary should be clearly marked within the application. The original copy of an application that does not result in an award will be retained by the Agency for a period of three years. Other copies will be destroyed. Such an application will be released only with the consent of the applicant or to the extent required by law. An application may be withdrawn at any time prior to the final action thereon.

D. Regulatory Information

For the reasons set forth in the final Rule related Notice to 7 CFR part 3015, subpart V (48 FR 29114, June 24, 1983), this program is excluded from the scope of the Executive Order 12372 which requires intergovernmental consultation with State and local officials. Under the provisions of the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (44 U.S.C. chapter 35), the collection of information requirements contained in this Notice have been approved under OMB Document No. 0524-0039.

E. Definitions

Please refer to 7 CFR 3430, Competitive and Noncompetitive Non-formula Grant Programs--General Grant Administrative Provisions, for applicable definitions for this NIFA grant program.